

Armenian Residents in the Heart of Isfahan

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Abstract:

Isfahan is one of the richest and most historical cities of Iran, and Jolfa is located in its southern part which is separated from other parts by the Zayandeh –Roud. Since Jolfa is home for Armenian residents in this region, therefore, it is different from cultural, social and economic viewpoint. Texture By taking into consideration its four-hundred years antiquity, it possesses a series of valuable historical buildings, which has locational – atmospherical-social and cultural advantages. But severity of packed damages on the shell of Jolfa region in recent decade has been so much because of dispersion of single remained buildings that has resulted in defacement of the concept “historical texture” and facing Jolfa region to “form and environmental identification crisis”, but inner values of Jolfa are still so impressive. In recent years different plans in order to renovate and rehabilitate this historical texture have been performed. This article concerns with introduction of Jolfa quarter and plans performed in order to rehabilitate and protect Jolfa region.

Keywords: Jolfa, Iran, rehabilitation, Isfahan, Armenian and Culture

Introduction

Zayandeh –Roud River separates the northern Isfahan from its Southern part. The historical setting of Jolfa is an exclusive context which includes a valuable complex of historical structures that are granted with a variety of situational, spatial, social, and cultural merits especially from a touristic point of view. However, due to the dispersion of the remained historical single structures throughout this exotic area, doubt has been cast on the validity of its picture as a “historical setting”; and the area, accordingly, has been undergoing structural-spatial, social, and cultural identity crisis. However, notwithstanding this problematic situation, Jolfa is still an adequate context for the development of tourism industry in Isfahan and by implementing some modifications a balance can be reached between the historical structures on one hand and the modern urban structures on the other. The urban structure of Jolfa created based on the aesthetic standards of space and benefits from the employment of a variety of arts including architecture, tiling, plastering, and drawing, which are exhibited to the addressee. Standards like mixture, balance, conformity, symmetry, scale, polarity, opposition, priority, rhythm, variety, homogeneity, contrast, recurrence, and emphasis, have been employed in each and every one of the urban structures as well as the whole space of the town.

The new urban district of Jolfa alongside its old urban structure suggests, to a great extent, the feeling of spatial-unity. The major factor contributing to the pleasantness of Jolfa urban structure is its identity. The high velocity of changes in the city of Isfahan not only has not debilitated its identity, but also has added to it. This situation has also raised the area's status and has doubled the feeling of belonging to the space and place through creating symbolic and meaningful spaces. The existence of the well-structured streets, buildings, and squares that have been constructed based on the social and cultural beliefs and attitudes of the people is joyful and glorious to them and encourages the strength of identity.

Under what influences the spatial-physical structure of Jolfa has been constructed? Is the environmental quality and visual outlook of Jolfa open to investigation?



Figure 1: view of isfahan

The Historical Development of Jolfa

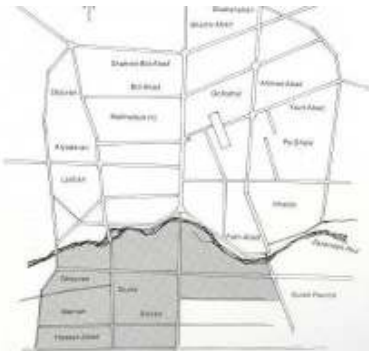
The early development of Jolfa dates back to 400 years ago during the reign of Shah Abbas I, when Shah Abbas Safavi transplanted the Armenian people to Isfahan in order to protect them against violation and attacks on the part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1603 AD, Shah Abbas arrived in Tabriz, then proceeded to Nakhjivan and conquered Jolfa and then Irvan; and passed all the Armenian across the Aras River into Iran where he settled them then. The Great Shah Abbas' period especially during Shah Abbas II's reign was the heyday of this territory, and this situation sustained into some periods afterward.



Figure2: map s of Jolfa

Jolfa in the Modern Age

At the beginning of the current century or generally at the contemporary age, the Zayandeh – Roud river territory was considered a suburban area of Isfahan, the only residential region of which was just Jolfa as well as a few dispersed villages located at the western part of the realm. Due to the decline of pressure on the Armenian during the Pahlavi age, its population strictly increased (e.g., to 6161 at 1345) and gradually came to be known as one of the most prestigious neighborhoods in Isfahan; with the increase in the urban public traffic (movement) space during the recent decades, the south sphere turned to be the main arena for the enhancement of building density, building height, and land and house price; faceless buildings began to pop up and a great majority of the invaluable gardens and buildings, which had survived up to that particular time, were destroyed. In fact, from the 70s onward is considered to be the second stage of wide-ranging destruction at the historical context of Jolfa, when the inattention and negligence of executive organizations as well as some internal factors resulted in this mishap.



from part of Isfahan



Figure5: maps of new urban district of Jolfa

maps

The Structural Design of Jolfa

Jolfa neighborhood is subdivided into New Jolfa and Old Jolfa. New Jolfa is widened along the Noabad town from Zayandehrood River to Chaharsoo (Sangtarashha); is running the length of Nazar street; and includes these sub-neighborhoods: The Big Square, The Small Square, Shirak-Khaneh alley, Chahar-Soogh-e Hakoopchan (Hasirbafab neighborhood), and Gharakel (Ghinan) which is placed at the center of the small square of St. George Church and wherein Vank Cathedral, and, Maryam, and Bethlehem churches are located. Chaharsoo is another neighborhood which is located among the other Armenian-inhabited neighborhoods, where Yoohana, Hwans, and Magrpich churches and Nuns convent are situated.

The historical Jolfa at the Safavis era had been located on the barren lands, fertile plains, and gardens in the south of Zayandehrood and its design had been based on that of Bagh-Shahr and Bagh-Rah. Nazar Street was the backbone of Jolfa; Shahmarimanian and Sarfarazian gates were surrounding the Big Square and the Small Square and up to Ghajars' reign over Jolfa were devoid of any rampart or wall. On two side of Nazar Street were the Big and the Small squares, the construction history of which with regard to the strength of the buildings around it dates back to the beginning of Pahlavi era. However, there is no doubt that the place had earlier been used as an open space or a meeting house with social functions at the seasonal square of Jolfa, and because of the connection between the neighborhoods at the river banks and Nazar Street, the north-south crossing known as Dahgane had been extended from the river side to this street.



Figure 6: view of Vank Cathedral



Figure7: Sangtarashha neighborhood square

The Current Plan of Jolfa after 1920m

Jolfa district includes historical neighborhoods, has an area of 214 hectares and a population of 19000 including 6000 Armenians in the 70s. In the present situation, Jolfa is considered a residential setting almost without most tourist facilities. The major public service land-uses in this area include 16 historical churches, Armen kindergarten, coeducational junior high school and high schools, Jolfa historical bathhouse, a part of Tabriziha historical bathhouse, and some cultural-academic land-uses sited in the historical houses in Sangtarashha and Tabriziha neighbourhoods. On the other hand, the social functions of Jolfa square have strictly declined and there are just some traces left of Nayj and Shayj madi strips. The historical bathhouse of

Chaharsoo and all the neighborhoods gates and walls, several historical churches and most of the historical houses of Jolfa have been ruined. At the present time, the remaining historical buildings in Jolfa are most churches.

With the exception of some major cases, all the other passageways are either by definitions without commercial land-uses, or just have small shops found all along the western and eastern Nazar, Khaghani, Tohid, Hakim Nezami streets, and main passageways of the town. A series of minor passageways provide the internal connections of Jolfa anyway. However, the provision of internal connections, while some of the minor passageways are considered the main traffic axes of the town, is in many ways thorny.



Figure 8: one of the historical house remaining



Figure 9: part of Shayj madi strip



Figure 10: interior court view of St. George Church



Figure 11: Chaharsoo square

The Environmental Quality and Visual Scenery of Jolfa

The urban spaces of Jolfa do not correspond to the characteristics of urban architecture. Given the function of Hakim Nezami Street, for instance, as an interurban link of Isfahan, the establishment of a collection of automobile garages and service workstations is not congruent with this context. But, Jolfa is devoid of distinctive entries corresponding with its broad domain of functions. In addition, the destruction of the valuable historical houses has led to the decline of environmental quality and visual scenery of the district. At present, the historical passageways of Jolfa have developed into parking lots and car nests and are about to wreck. However, Jolfa squares and alleys have been constructed in a series of contrastive spaces which are enclosed by the body of residential units that jointly make a simple and consistent collection; a characteristic that suggests a sense of movement and dynamicity. The twisting nature of the alleys and their being roofless and roof-covered with their coherent inflowing into the big and small squares creates a sense of variety. The beautiful brooks along with rows of spruce and sycamore, especially those which flow through the gardens and flower beds among the residential buildings and are rarely found at the modern age are eye-catching.

Some of the alleys are covered by overarches the dark and light play of which both adds to the

taste of variety in the space and increases the enclosure sense of the environment. The entrance of each house slightly pulls back, and a bench-like resting space has been contrived beside it to provide the pre-space required for entering the house.



Figure 13: view of The Big Square



Figure 12: Sangtarashha historical passageway

The Factors Influencing the Spatial Quality of Jolfa

In this section, four factors influencing the spatial quality of Jolfa, i.e., tranquility, the sense of belonging, enclosure, and public sidewalks, are investigated. Tranquillity: Natural elements abound in all the alleys and impasses and due to the hierarchy of supervision provided by citizens, these set the ground for mental tranquility. Balance in bodies and avoiding the employment of a variety that attracts attention controls emotions in the structural space and while keeps you away from monotony, does not disturb your peace. At the same time, the exposure of the alleys to more public space is inhibited through forming windings.



Figure 14: Natural elements abound in alley

Another characteristic of these alleys is the use of natural elements in creating the feeling of tranquility and quietness in the passages. In the alleys, brooks flow and the presence of trees and greenbelts is noticeable.

The sense of belonging: The alleys and impasses of the Iranians are the extension of their private life and the individual has a sense of belonging to it. The presence of a stage for sitting beside the house entrance is a joint space between some neighboring houses that makes the residents of the neighborhood socially closer. The existence of an open playground for kids between a few of houses is a good enough excuse for their mothers to crowd together.



Figure15: The presence of stages for sitting beside the houses entrance

Enclosure: In the alleys and impasses, the strangers are not well accepted since their entrances are built in a way that defines their own territory and reminds the passersby of more public passageways that they are encountering a more private space wherein they can not freely move about or have recreation. This characteristic is usually implied through narrowness, the lack of direct view to the alleys and/or the presence of ceiling or awning.



Figure16: sabat the alley



Figure17: the lack of direct view to

Sidewalks: Sidewalks are the location for the presence of all the citizens and their cooperation in their public life. Although flexibility is one of the important features of sidewalks, but what guarantees the presence of citizens therein is the security of such spaces.



Figure 18: one of the Sidewalks in the jolfa district

The Comprehensive Plans Conducted

In the first comprehensive program named Cox which was conducted in the historical area of Jolfa, the construction of these streets despite their impact in facilitating regional communications resulted in a rupture in the consistency of urban and historical development of the area. The revision program of cultural-historical axis of Isfahan in 1368 from the old square was initiated but the historical context of Jolfa was not accounted for as a part of this axis.

The Programs Conducted by Isfahan City Reconstruction and Renovation Organization

Isfahan City Reconstruction and Renovation Organization with the aim of restoring the historical context of Jolfa, the cultural-historical and touristic axis of Khaghani Street, the Vank Cathedral, Maryam church, Chahar Soogh, Jolfa, Sangtarashha, and Tabriziha alleys; regularization of Najj and Shayj madis; regularization and restoration of Jolfa Square; and body construction and restoration of Sangtarashha-Tabriziha passageway which is currently in progress. Hitherto, intervention into the historical context of Jolfa has been sporadic and intermittent. It seems urgent that the related municipality as a first priority lay down the strategic plan of Jolfa as immediately as possible. The strategic plan of Jolfa studies the historical context of the area with reference to its current role and status in relation to the whole city. Investigating the capacities, potentials, limitations, problems, and the needs of the historical area, the structural strategic plan introduces a number of policies and strategies to be used for development in large scales, followed by a general pattern for the development and restoration of this historical context. This plan does not deal with the details and can be considered a basis for future plans.

A proposed place-check of Jolfa using SWOT method

<i>Opportunities, Facilities & Vision</i>	<i>Threats, Limitations & Difficulties</i>	<i>Principles & Standards</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presence of active local social centers with the potential to develop into dynamic regional centers. -The cultural variety widespread throughout the area. -High rate of literacy. -Adequate financial capabilities of the new residents of the context. -Relative security of Jolfa particularly for the development of tourism industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The irregular increase of population due to irregular buildings. -High rate of the Armenians' emigration from Jolfa. 	<i>Society & Population</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relative high rate of investment in Jolfa in recent years. - The limited formation of the cultural and academic line along the Sangtarashha-Tabriziha passageway and the high capacity of the axis in increasing their acceptability of such land-uses and developing Jolfa into the cultural cannon of the south district. - The possibility of developing the churches into multifunctional settings. -The existence of a number of historical houses with the necessary capacity for the establishment of public service land-uses or shopping malls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The imbalance between the increasing rate of population and employment centers. -The establishment of unsuited and inhomogeneous urban activities. -The unsystematic establishment urban activities. -The lack of formulated and scheduled programs. -The displacement of incompatible and mismatched urban activities 	<i>Activity & Function</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Providing the revision plan of the Detailed plan of district five. -Isfahan City Reconstruction and Renovation Organization and its steps toward drawing attention towards the historical contexts. -Expanding the budget of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization in order to purchase valuable historical houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The lack of union between the municipality and the Cultural Heritage Organization. - Failing to provide the strategic plan of Jolfa. -Insensitivity to the passed standards especially concerning altitude. -The shortage of financial and legal facilities for the possession of the various land-uses especially workshops and public service centers, and the lack of union between the municipality and the Cultural Heritage Organization. -Failing to drawing up the development budget for the preservation and restoration of Jolfa. -The absence of a particular organization in custody of the preservation and restoration of the historical area of Jolfa. 	<i>Legal</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various facilities for the organization of the present space. - The presence of historical passages with the capacity to be converted into passageways with passerby priority of use. - The existence of the green outlooks of Shayj and Nayj, which can be effective in promoting the environmental quality of Jolfa. -The fast access to the natural axis of Zayandehrood, the historical axis of Jolfa, and the scenery of Soffeh Mountain, in conjunction with the presence of the historical context and cultural and social features of Jolfa, have capacitated Jolfa as the first priority in the tourism development of Isfahan. -The capacity for the limited formation of the new streets in the context. -The existence of a collection of important historical buildings. - The spatial potentials of Nazar Street from Tohid to Hakim Nezami. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The limited width of passage networks, that makes the increase of population or service centers making up the high traffic mass less likely. -The dispersion of historical buildings along the passageways, which leaves little space for widening it without a high extent of destruction of historical buildings. -The dense context of the area, which makes any change recommendation or modification in the present structure without destroying a section of the context impossible. - Establishing incompatible land-uses in terms of type and function scale. - The contradiction between the present communication axis functions and the main functions of the street. -Failing to realize the axes of the Comprehensive Plan. - The strict cutback of the historical gardens of Jolfa. - The strict limitation of public green beds. - Sever shortage of public service centers. - Drying of brooks and madis -Sever lack of public parking lots. 	<i>Structural-Spatial</i>

<i>Executive Policies</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Principles & Standards</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Restricting the building height domain in the historical nucleus of Jolfa to one or two floors; and determining the height domain in the secondary territory of Jolfa. - Allocating the historical buildings to the touristic and accommodation services with the priority of employing the Armenian in their management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inhibiting the increase of irregular buildings beyond the capacity of Jolfa. - Establishing occupation and activity centers with the priority of employing the Armenian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Determining the growth rate of population. -Hindering the cumulative trend of emigration from Jolfa. -Increasing cooperation of the people and executive organizations in the restoration of Jolfa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The stabilization and control of the population. -The preservation of identity and noble values of Jolfa. 	<i>Society & Population</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reinforcing and creating commercial and public service centers in Khaghani street, Chahar-Soogh, Boo-Ali, Vank Cathedral, and Jolfa alleys. -Establishing cultural and educational activities along the Sangtarashha-Tabriziha passageway. -Relocating Refah shopping mall. - Transferring workshops and service stations from Hakim Nezami street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Combining land and building laws with those of urbanization. -Dynamic preservation of valuable historical buildings. - Preparing and enacting standards and regulations on the establishment method of various urban activities in Jolfa and requiring the municipality to practice those. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Economical exploitation of the urban lands and the existing spaces. -Creating functional identity in the context. -Establishing activity centers with a limited traffic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing the vocation centers and promoting the role of Jolfa in the economic design of Isfahan through functional refinement and establishing a diverse system of activities, compatible with the historical identity of Jolfa. 	<i>Activity & Function</i>

-Preparing the Strategic Plan of Jolfa. - Preparing and enacting standards and regulations for establishing and locating the facility centers with prioritizing the provision of the Comprehensive Plan of Jolfa in the revision of the Comprehensive Plan of the area five. -Establishing the Development Organization of Jolfa.	- Custodianship of developmental affairs of Jolfa specifically. - Requiring the executive organizations to follow the standards and regulations, specially the Comprehensive Plan. -Providing the required finances in the cooperation of the people, municipality, and the Cultural Heritage Organization as well as other organizations. -Revising the existing standards. - Awarding economic and tax exemptions.	-Determining the legal boundaries of Jolfa. -Employing adequate strategies for the provision of required financial sources. -Preparing and formulating a collection of executive regulations and rules for intervention into the historical context of Jolfa.	-Legislative conduction. - Structural-spatial development of Jolfa.	<i>Legal</i>
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<i>Executive Policies</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Goals</i>
-Rehabilitating, restoring, and modernizing all the historical churches. - Relocating Refah shopping mall. -Converting Boo-Ali passage into a public service line with the priority of supplying cultural products. - Establishing tourism and service complexes in the French school, Baghuskhanian hospital, and the neighboring historical buildings. -Converting Sangtarashha passage to a cultural-academic line with an urban-regional function. -Converting the passages leading to Khaghani, the end of eastern Nazar, and the likely passages of Sangtarashha-Tabriziha into impasses. - Stopping the traffic from	-Transferring the land-uses which are inhomogeneous in terms of type and function. -Establishing cultural, recreational, touristic land-uses. -Creating the internal connection among the historical structures aiming to making up multifunctional public service complexes. - Restoring the historical passages and lines. - Inhibiting or limiting the exploitation of passage network of Jolfa as a public passage network. - Constructing cycling and walking networks. - Constructing numerous small parking lots in areas	-Converting Jolfa into the historical-cultural-touristic axis of Isfahan. - Establishing adequate urban land-uses compatible with historical structure of Jolfa. -Developing mixed land-use pattern. - Reinforcing passerby axes and reducing the traffic mass. - Enhancing pedestrian security. - Creating visual legibility and clarity in the historical settings. - Improving visual features and urban scenery of Jolfa. - Increasing green beds and grounds. - Increasing public service centers and their per capita. -Reassessing and giving identity to the hierarchical	-Restoring the historical framework of Jolfa as the historical-cultural-touristic axis of Isfahan. - Modifying the existing structural-spatial space as a dynamic and lively context in satisfying the current needs in order for founding a favorable relationship between community and the environment.

<p>the end of eastern Nazar and Khaghani.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing Khaghani into a one-way street streaming from east to west. -Converting Tabriziha alley, Boo-Ali passageway and a section of Jolfa-Madi into impasses. - Building Safavi Street. - Situating parking lots at appropriate places at the entries of Khaghani, Nazar, Sangtarashha, and Jolfa -Madi streets. - Designing the centers of Shekarchian, Sangtarashha, Tabriziha and Khaghani neighborhoods. -Reconstructing the historical gates of Shahrmanian, Sarafrazian, and Jolfa Square gate. -Preparing a plan for landscaping of the major passageways, and paving of the minor passageways. 	<p>outside the common sight and away from the main streets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improving the formal and functional features of the historical neighborhoods of Jolfa. - Creating new urban spaces and improving the current ones. - -Improving the formal and functional features of the historical madis. - Reinforcing and emphasizing the symbolic elements and signs. - Making urban image plans, landscaping, designing sceneries, and paving in specific axes. -Formulating height standards and regulations. 	<p>subdivisions of Jolfa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reducing the spatial isolation of Jolfa. -Increasing the land-uses of public stations and parking lots. 	
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Conclusion

On the whole, the historical area of Jolfa as a minority-inhabited sphere inherits a unique historical context the preservation and protection of which has its own particular subtleties. Jolfa area has two historical nucleuses, one with a primary and the other with a secondary boundary. These boundaries have not so far been recognized in the Cultural Heritage Organization plans and the height and building standards can not be considered identical in both the boundaries. If the irregular buildings keep progressing in this fashion, Jolfa will explode from the inside and will be left with spaces replete with a crowd of large buildings and passages the bottom of which due to the cumulative mass of automobiles may not be visible. At that point in time, we will not have anything remained of Jolfa but a few churches as symbols of the historical enclosed Jolfa. In order to take steps towards the preservation of Jolfa, following recommendations are proposed:

Introducing Jolfa via the public mass media and gaining the cooperation of the people, especially those who possess old houses, in order to preserve this historical context.

Determining the domain and boundaries of municipality's intervention right in the region.

Preparing the Strategic Plan of Jolfa.

Specifying the particular organizations and headquarters in custody of the developmental affairs of Jolfa.

Avoiding the irregular download of population and urban services.

Awarding tax-exemption and encouraging policies.

Preparing and conducting city image plans within the area borders as well as landscaping plans and scenery designs at the main passageways.

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